

## RHYTHM AND MOVES

Music is part of every culture and it's wonderful right-brain stuff. Music evokes thought and imagery, memories and emotion. Rhythm and melodies elicit almost automatic body movements such as toe tapping, head nods, and sways. I think that it is these qualities that make musical activities both fun and effective. Rhythm has a way of prepping people for movement, helping them anticipate when, where, and how to move. Musically inspired movements tend to involve the whole body, too, which is one more great reason for using music to help with balance and whole-body coordination. This section remains my favorite.

### ***Benefits »***

- ⊙ Coordinates whole-body, sequential movements.
- ⊙ Helps transitions feel easier, almost automatic.
- ⊙ Uses previously learned dance skills.
- ⊙ Enriches the mind-body connection.
- ⊙ Benefits participants of all levels.

### ***Set It Up »***

Gather music from the participants' generation for these activities. It's difficult to get quality songs from the 30s and 40s; but by the 50s, there seems to be more available through Web site distributors. Select songs that match the activities you choose. "Theme From *A Summer Place*" by Percy Faith is an excellent waltz that works great for sidestepping. *My Girl* by The Rolling Stones is great for Rock and Walk; try *Blueberry Hill* by Fats Domino or *Don't Fence Me In* by Bing Crosby for box stepping and Patti Page's *Tennessee Waltz* for Tai Chi and lots of other slow activities. You'll discover that certain songs work better for certain moves.

### ***How to Do It »***

Do any set of movements one at a time at first. Combine them as participants improve.

#### ***Toe Taps and Head Nods***

- ⊙ Begin seated. Select some toe-tapping music (I've liked *Do You Believe in Magic* by the Loving Spoonfuls and *I Walk the Line* by Johnny Cash). Try these seated moves.
  - Toe taps
  - Head nods
  - Arm swings (with stabilized torso)
  - Seated marching (with stabilized torso, march in place)
  - Heel-toe foot tapping
  - Marching and arm swings combined
  - Heel-toe stepping with arm swings combined

Increase the balance challenge of this activity with the following:

- ⊙ While seated, participants close their eyes.
  - Arm swings and head turns to music
  - Heel-toe foot tapping

### ***Some Simple Standing Moves***

When doing any standing musical activities, be safe. Participants should be within an arm's length of their chair, near a handrail or their backs should be to a wall. For frailer adults, use a chair on either side of them or use a walker. Abler classes can stand beside a chair or handrail, maybe with one hand on their hip. If they can free stand, have them stand in front of their chair with one leg touching it. Ideally, they'll follow your moves as you lead them, but allow them to find their own rhythm and make their own choices for what they feel safe doing.

- ◎ Stand with good posture and appropriate balance support. If you're ready for another song, pick a slower one than above (*Begin the Beguine* by the Limelighters, or *The Birds and Bees* by Jewel Akens) and do these moves.
  - Sways
  - Small steps in place
  - Marching in place
- ◎ Do advanced standing activities.
  - Marching with higher knees
  - Marching with wider steps
  - Arm swings and marching
  - Look left, look right, while marching

### ***Box Step***

This multidirectional stepping pattern practices weight shifts and agility. It is a set of simple steps that form a square. You can give it more balance challenge by pairing up participants, to box step like two dancers would.

- ◎ Select some good box-step music from their era. I like *Blueberry Hill* by Fats Domino and *Don't Fence Me In* by Bing Crosby.
- ◎ Participants practice steps that form a square. The outside foot takes the step. Practice first without music, then with music. Use these cues:
  - Sidestep right, together
  - Forward step right, together
  - Sidestep left, together
  - Back step left, together

### ***Waltzing Matildas***

Sidestepping is a foot pattern in waltzing; hence the name *Waltzing Matildas*. When you add music to sidestepping, that's when participants are most involved with their whole body. Soon they want to twirl and arabesque; sidestepping becomes a whole-body waltz.

- ◎ Music is a must for this activity, of course. I like "Theme From *A Summer Place*" by Percy Faith. It is so lilting and smooth. But you could also use the original "Waltzing Matilda" song, too.
- ◎ Pair up participants into dance partners.
- ◎ Prepare for crowd control—space everyone out so couples can sidestep several steps before changing directions.



- ◎ Practice sidestepping with no music.
  - Step together, step. Step together, step.
  - Change directions and repeat.
  - Use bigger steps.
  - Step together, step, etc.
- ◎ Turn on the waltz music.
  - Step together, step. Step together, step.
- ◎ Cue pairs to add arm swings to the music.
- ◎ Cue them for bigger, deeper steps (add a knee bend to each side step).
  - Step, knee bends and then straightens as they finish the sidestep.
  - Step, knee bends and then straighten. Step, etc.

Watch as these basic step-together movements become fluid, whole-body moves. Instead of moving just the legs, the entire body gets involved: Arms, torso, head, and emotions. It is remarkable and fun to see the transformation. Use these cues.

- ◎ Step together, step.
- ◎ Feel the flow. Step together, step.
- ◎ Notice how your whole body creates the movement.
- ◎ Feel the sway and enjoy!
- ◎ Sing or count along.

You can give this activity more balance challenge by doing the following:

- ◎ Dim the lights. (Romantic, as it should be.)
- ◎ Add turns, progress to the next activity.

### ***Step Together, Step Turns***

- ◎ Begin with just sidestepping, then add turns.
  - Step together, step. Step together, step.
  - Step together, step turn.
  - One partner turns underneath one hand and arm of the other partner. The guiding partner can use his/her other hand as balance support for the turning partner.

### ***Rock and Walk***

Rock and Walk is similar to the movement of normal gait. Heel-toe motion and weight transitions rule this activity.

- ◎ Pick out suitable music with a rocking melody. I like *My Girl* by the Rolling Stones; it helps that most participants know the words and like it too. I also recommend the great rhythm of *Hackensack* by Fountains of Wayne.
- ◎ If you plan to do the tandem line option, put down 2 or 4, 12-foot (4-meter) lines of tape on the floor, about 4 feet (1.5 m) apart. You'll want to have one person on each line and the people holding outstretched hands. Plan that you will be one of the people on the line, holding hands with participants who will take turns doing the Rock and Walk with you.
- ◎ As a warm-up, do some heel-toe rocking a few times with feet shoulder-width apart. Three great practice activities could be Heel-Touch and Roll-Up; Rock Back, Knee Lift; and Rock Forward, Knee Lift.



- ⦿ Then pick one volunteer to join you on the tandem lines. You're ready to cue up the music.
- ⦿ You and your participant get on one line each. One foot forward and one foot back.
- ⦿ Hold hands at about shoulder height and wait for the music.
- ⦿ Start the music! Here are some cues to use:
  - Rock forward, rock back, in time with the music.
  - Keep rocking until it feels comfortable.
  - Keep your eyes on the horizon.
  - Use full heel-toe motion.
  - Ask if your partner can feel the heel-toe weight shifts. (Weight crosses from the heel through the foot to the toe.)
  - Rock forward, rock back. Rock forward, rock back.
  - Listen, and when you sense the music says "now," take a step. Land on the line.
  - Rock forward and back again two or three times.
  - Rock until the music leads you to the next step. Take the next step with the music.
  - Then rock back and forth again, until you're ready for the next step.
  - That's Rock and Walk!
  - Feel the rhythm of your rocking.
  - Feel how the music can guide your movements, and tell you when to step.
  - Notice how the front foot lifts naturally when you rock back and how the rear leg is ready to lift toward the next step when it's time to step.
  - Rock three times, step; rock three times, step.
  - It's Rock and Walk!
  - Ask how they liked it? Was it fun, did they get it?

- Next Partner? I've done it with a partner on each side. I've also had good luck letting them be each other's partner instead of me being the only partner. Use your own sense for what will work with your group. Any way you do it, this one is amazing and fun.



### ***Give It More Balance »***

- ⦿ Relax and feel the flow.
- ⦿ Turn down the lights or wear sunglasses.
- ⦿ Do it on a poly balance beam.

### ***Keep It Safe »***

Music should have the appropriate volume and cadence. If it's too loud, participants will feel distracted by it. If it's too soft, it's hard to feel the rhythm. The pace should be moderate; the melody inviting and, easy to follow. Balance support should be ample. Hold their hand or provide a handrail.

### ***Live It »***

Music and rhythm enhance anticipatory skills and improve sequential movements, including gait. Music evokes pleasant memories and can make balance training fun and relaxing.